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THE UNITARIAN CHURCHES AND INTERNATIONAL PEACE

BY

CHARLES W. WENDTE, D.D.

We want men of original perception and original action who can open their eyes wider than to a nationality; namely, to considerations of benefit to the human race.—*R. W. Emerson.*

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FOREWORD.

This address, delivered at the Twenty-sixth General Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches, held in San Francisco in August, 1915, has been reprinted from its published proceedings for a wider circulation. It is surprising that while members of the Unitarian fellowship have in all times and countries been prominent in their advocacy of peace and good-will between individuals and between nations, yet among the numerous books and tracts issued in our time by Unitarian Publication Societies there is not one which deals specifically with this great and needed reform in human society. However inadequate in itself, this address may yet help to acquaint our Unitarian churches and the general public more fully with the large and honorable part borne in times past and present by Unitarians in furthering the cause of international peace. It may aid to impress them with their personal duty of practising the principles of good-will and peace in the ordering of their lives, in the conduct of their religious propaganda, the fulfilment of their political obligations, and the realization of their international opportunities. Our spiritual fathers were faithful to the higher vision. May we their children be equally loyal in our day to the gospel of love and universal brotherhood!

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THE UNITARIAN CHURCHES AND INTERNATIONAL PEACE.

In the lurid light of the present terrible European war, the cause of International Peace is disclosed to us as the most imminent and important issue now confronting the peoples of the earth, and especially the Christian nations. For, however we may interpret particular teachings of the religion of Jesus, there can be no question among his followers that in its essence his gospel is pacific and conciliatory, and fundamentally opposed to violence and strife. It is a gospel of peace and good-will among men, aiming at the dominance of spiritual, fraternal principles among them, and seeking through gentle persuasion to establish on earth ideal commonwealths in which the spirit of reason, justice, love, and service shall be enthroned above all, and passion, selfishness, fear, hatred, and cruelty shall be suppressed and overcome.

That we who profess to be Christians have not more completely embodied these lofty principles of the Master in our ways of thinking and living and our social and political institutions should be a matter for penitent confession and serious consideration. But it in no wise impairs the binding obligation of these personal and social ideals of our religion, in which alone are to be found our safety and happiness as individuals and peoples.

The proclamation of these pacific principles as the sovereign rule of personal and social life ought to be the central purpose of the Christian Church. The aim of that Church should be to build up an ideal order of society in which the rational and spiritual forces of the soul shall be in the ascendency, and become the inward leaven which, working outwardly, permeates the whole social structure and family of nations, assuring their mental and moral health, quickening them with mutual good-will and service, and bringing them to the realization that God hath made of one blood all nations of men, that the interests of all men everywhere are identical, that "all men's good should be each man's rule," that men should

live in equitable and friendly relations with each other and find in the ideals of universal peace and brotherhood their highest incentive and most perfect satisfaction.

If all the churches equally acknowledged this as their chief human service, the triumph of justice, good-will, and peace would be assured on earth. It is their misfortune and shame that too often they do not; that they exalt validity of doctrine and ecclesiastical conformity above the reverent mind, the loving heart, the righteous life, thus giving rise in Christendom to lamentable differences and divisions, to the arrogance and intolerance, the hatred and persecution which have disfigured the annals of the Church, destroyed the possibility of peace among Christians at home, and made of small account their influence for peace in the international field. Religion, which should be a bond of union and brotherhood among men, is thus made a source of discord and strife among them. For how is it possible to cherish the sentiment of universal peace when the heart is filled with sectarian intolerance and hate?

Think of what it means when in the face of the frightful lessons the European war is bringing us the most conspicuous evangelist in the United States, a religious teacher who is introduced to admiring multitudes as "the foremost Christian of the age," should in his public utterances indulge in such displays of intolerant fury against all who do not accept his particular brand of Christianity, consigning them to an eternity of torment and suffering, calling upon God in frenzied prayer and sermon to kill and destroy them as enemies of his cause on earth, while leading Protestant clergymen listen approvingly to these atrocious sentiments, and vast audiences, composed principally of professing Christians, delightedly applaud them.

Such exhibitions not only violate the spirit of him who said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another"; they also tend to destroy the possibility of realizing on earth that peace and good-will among the peoples of the earth which is a central feature in the religion of Jesus.

Is it not apparent that unless the various denominations of Christians cherish peace and good-will among themselves there can be no peace among the nations? Not the peace of a uniform doctrine or worship, for that would only mean intellectual stagnation, the surrender of individual freedom, and the negation of all progress in truth and righteousness, but the peace of which the

apostle spoke when he said, "Let each be persuaded in his own mind," yet also enjoined on us "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

Men need to be brought to realize more the supreme importance of moral and spiritual principles in assuring the peace of the world. Politicians and economists may frame devices to lessen the frequency of wars and the evils of militarism, but the only complete immunity against these scourges of the human race is so to inoculate the minds of men with rational, ethical, and altruistic sentiments as to render them superior to mere passion, prejudice, and greed, and consecrate them to the highest ideals of personal and social service. This is a slow process, and calls for an almost inconceivable faith, patience, and devotion on the part of good men and good citizens, but it is the only trustworthy and adequate method of achieving the desired result.

The churches are of all human instrumentalities best fitted for this work of moral and social inspiration. Let them be equal to their great mission, bearing loyal witness to this cause in pulpit and pew, instructing the youth in their parishes in the principles of social justice and good-will, combining with the statesmen and the economists to promote wise and pacific measures in the social and political body, and to lift the prevailing narrow conception of patriotism to the broader vision of the commonwealth of mankind and the federation of the world.

The Unitarian Churches, and Peace.

From this general survey of the attitude and duty of the Christian Church toward the peace cause let us turn to consider what has been and what should be our Unitarian attitude toward it, as a particular body of churches in Christendom. It must be admitted in all humility that the Unitarians also have been deficient in their testimony in behalf of this great human and social interest. Too often they have yielded to the lure or threat of militarism and a narrow, selfish interpretation of patriotic duty and national welfare. The Unitarian Fellowship as a whole has made no such splendid record for itself in this cause as has been the case with the Society of Friends, who for centuries have placed the principles of universal peace in the very centre of their teaching, and bravely upheld its ideals against the ridicule, scorn, and hatred of men.

But one thing we may justly claim for our Unitarian household of faith, that from the very beginning of its organized existence its leaders have advocated the doctrines of freedom, tolerance, good-will, and peace among men, as chief among the requirements of a Christian. In the early days, three centuries and more ago, when our faith was first assuming form in Europe, our Arian and Socinian forefathers made peace between individuals and between peoples, and the repudiation of militarism, one of the principal and characteristic articles of their teaching. Many of these early Unitarian reformers even counselled their followers not to hold public office, lest in so doing it might become their duty to inflict the death penalty. Others among them declined to go to such extremes. But all alike maintained that to take human life was unchristian and sinful, and adjured their fellow-believers not to wear arms or participate in wars. That they derived these pacific principles from the Anabaptists of that day, the great precursors of democratic liberties and social justice, does not detract from the nobility with which our spiritual fathers entertained, and the heroism with which through long centuries of persecution they defended, these opinions.

The mantle of these peace-loving authors of our faith fell upon worthy successors when, a hundred and more years ago, the founders of our church in America, returning to the simplicity of the gospel of Christ, became the intellectual leaders and exponents of the peace reform in this country. Dr. William Ellery Channing's great discourses against war, and his other pacifist writings, powerfully arraigned the baleful spirit and direful consequences of militarism, and the evils of a misguided patriotism. He surveyed, from the standpoint of enlightened Christian principles, the whole field of international differences and strifes, practically saying everything that can be said on the subject from a religious and moral point of view, and furnishing succeeding generations of peace advocates with ethical inspiration and cogent argument for their campaigns. Dr. Channing's writings still remain a classic of the pacifist cause, so that to-day its leaders tell us, "Back to Channing," very much as the philosophic thinkers of the close of the nineteenth century enjoined, "Back to Kant," upon their disciples.

It was in Dr. Channing's study that another Unitarian minister, Dr. Noah Worcester, the devoted apostle of

international peace, organized—just a hundred years ago—the Massachusetts Peace Society, which has been foremost in the advocacy of this cause.

From a Unitarian layman, United States Senator Charles Sumner, came the most exhaustive review of the folly and wickedness of war, and most eloquent appeal for international peace, that had yet been made in the history of mankind. His oration on "The True Grandeur of Nations," delivered before the city authorities and people of Boston on the Fourth of July, 1845, remains one of the great landmarks of American Christianity.

In the mean time, from his pulpit in the Boston Music Hall, that Titan of American preachers, Theodore Parker, thundered his righteous indignation against war in general and the Mexican War in particular. The Unitarian poets Longfellow and Lowell, Emerson, Pierpont and Sears, as well as the liberal Quaker poet Whittier, devoted some of their noblest strains to the glorification of this spirit of peace and brotherhood among the nations.

The great Civil War for a time seemed to overpower and jeopardize this ethical passion and endeavor for peace. Our own generation, however, has witnessed a notable rebirth of these lofty sentiments in the American commonwealth. The movement for international justice and peace which is so characteristic of the present day, and which the frightful outburst of militarism in Europe only deepens and confirms, places the United States in the very forefront of the peace reform throughout the world. And again, Unitarians are taking a leading part in this most recent crusade against the insanity and horror of war. Foremost in the illustrious service more recently rendered the cause of international justice and peace was one of our great leaders, Edward Everett Hale, who crowned his long career of beneficence by his unfaltering devotion to the promotion of a better understanding and more fraternal relations between the nations of the earth. He was truly the American Apostle of Peace.

Our Unitarian poetess and advocate of high causes for human emancipation and betterment, Julia Ward Howe, anticipated by a third of a century the great woman's crusade for universal peace which has recently been inaugurated under fairer auspices, and which has enlisted not a few of our Unitarian sisters also in its well-considered endeavors for the reconciliation and uplift of the world.

Perhaps there exist to-day no more well-informed,

sane, and efficient workers in this cause than our consecrated fellow-believer, Edwin D. Mead, Director of the World Peace Foundation, and his equally able and devoted wife, Lucia Ames Mead. None exercise so great an influence on its fortunes both at home and abroad. None deserve a more grateful acknowledgment of their services in promoting good-will and peace among the nations.

To another Unitarian layman, the late Edwin Ginn of Boston, we owe the establishment of that important agency, the World Peace Foundation. To this cause Mr. Ginn consecrated his wealth and himself. Surely his name will ever be remembered with honor and gratitude among men! His influence will long be perpetuated by the noble institution he founded and endowed.

A similar tribute is due Dr. David Starr Jordan, an honored figure in the higher life of America, and especially of California, for the unique, varied, unremitting, and able service he is rendering the cause that lies so near his heart and our own. Among all his contributions to human welfare we believe none will prove to be more valuable or be more gratefully remembered than this.

I can only refer by name to Profs. Charles H. Levermore and Jay William Hudson, to Revs. Charles F. Dole, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Edward Cummings, Anna Garlin Spencer, John Haynes Holmes, Arthur L. Weatherly, and Charles E. Beals, and to Dr. Charles W. Eliot, earnest and able advocates of this reform.

I complete this partial enumeration of Unitarian contributions to the pacifist cause by adding the name of the honored president of this General Conference of our churches, Ex-President of the United States, William Howard Taft, whose efforts to preserve our nation's neutrality during the great war now raging, and to promote a rational and peaceful adjudication of international differences, are among the most notable and encouraging features of recent political life.

The Present Opportunity and Duty of Unitarian Christians in Behalf of International Peace.

In conclusion it remains to point out what is our present opportunity and duty as a religious body in serving this cause. As a body of churches we need to give a more central position in our denominational endeavors to this important social reform; preaching it from our pulpits and teaching it to our youth; co-operating with the great social and political movements of our time in promoting the broadest and most far-reaching policies, policies which inspire confidence and good-will, rather than the present short-sighted and exhausting measures which beget only fear and hostility and prove no reliable defence. Among these policies I venture to instance: that there shall be no more appropriations of territory by victors in war; that the true interest and desire of the inhabitants of every territory as to their political relations shall be respected; that there shall be no sowing of the seeds of revenge and future war; that the private manufacture of armaments and all vested interests in war shall be abolished; that no loans nor sale of war material shall hereafter be made by neutral peoples to belligerents; that the control of foreign policy shall be made more open and democratic in all nations, with an end to secret treaties and diplomacy; that the existing courts for the international arbitration of disputes between the nations have their scope and powers widely extended, and the armies and navies of the world be supplanted in time by an international police; and that, above all, the monstrous armaments, which are so largely responsible for the present catastrophe, shall be largely reduced.* Meanwhile let us see to it that our own nation shall not be betrayed by any perverted nationalism or reactionary impulse or hysteria or any false alarm, or be induced by insidious militarist agitation to forsake its safe, sane, and pacific policies, and plunge into what John Hay justly called "the most ferocious and futile of human follies—war."

But in formulating programmes and policies let us remember that the only real safety of the nation lies in the development of its spiritual and ethical forces. Peace on earth cannot be obtained by merely planning for a restriction of armaments or an international court of arbitration, or by figuring material profits. It can be obtained

*Edwin D. Mead, in "The Churches and the Crisis."

in fullest and most enduring measure only by an overpowering social enthusiasm and a religious and ethical passion that shall bring men to the realization that mankind is one in its origin, interests, and destiny; that "above all nations is humanity"; that all the races belong to one great world family, and find in the consciousness of their common brotherhood their safety and their happiness.

The Sympathy of Religions.

This higher conception of human relations, this passion for brotherhood and service, it is the privilege of the Christian Church to represent and impart. But it can only succeed in this when it conceives of religion in a large and irenic way. Religion held in narrow, dogmatic, unsympathetic forms is more likely to produce war than peace on earth. Bigoted and sectarian zeal fosters dissension and strife both at home and abroad.

Among the forces which make for peace none can surpass in far-reaching persuasiveness religious sympathy. Our Unitarian task is to display this sympathy in our dealings with other religious bodies. Hitherto, as a young and struggling cause, our propagandism has been largely along antagonistic lines. We have been intent on showing men the differences between our faith and the beliefs we have rejected. Whatever missionary value it may have had in the past, this method of antagonism should now be exchanged for more irenic and conciliatory approaches to our sister churches in Christendom. To seek for points of agreement rather than of difference with them; to give the best possible interpretation—not the worst—to their doctrines and modes of worship; to appreciate the truth and beauty of their point of view, and seek to come into closer fellowship with them, while yet surrendering no essential principle of our own faith,—this is the pacific policy to which our churches should henceforth be devoted. We may be misunderstood, flouted, scorned; our overtures may often be rejected; but in the end we shall prevail, and not only vastly increase our own happiness and welfare, but exercise an appreciable influence for interdenominational peace and good-will, for freedom and tolerance in Christendom.

In accomplishing this we shall also impress the Christian Church with the all-essential conviction that the only way to arrive at the inter-racial and international peace

of the world is through religious sympathy and good-will. So long as the Christian churches lay claim to an exclusive, divine right for themselves and insist that they are the only channels of salvation, so long as they treat the other great historic religions of the earth with contempt and lovelessness, there can be no good-will or enduring peace among the nations. The Christian missionary who denounces the venerable worships of Japan, China, or India as false and iniquitous wounds the susceptibilities of these ancient communities at their very core. He is not a bringer of good tidings of peace: he is a fomenter of international dislikes and strifes. When, as has been too often the case, his home government makes use of him to introduce a foreign influence and rule, the missionary is a forerunner of war and oppression, prompting the bitter saying among Orientals, "First the missionary, then the trader, and then the battleship." When such a missionary returns to his own country and to justify his employment draws distorted pictures of the moral and spiritual condition of the unconverted heathen in their own land, he again misrepresents the Oriental world, insults their happily increasing national consciousness and veneration for their own traditions and customs, and becomes a disturber, not a promoter of the peace of the world. International peace is not possible between Christian and non-Christian nations unless it is founded on mutual respect for one another's social and religious traditions. To approach these with a sympathetic and reverent spirit; to learn from them as well as to impart; to appreciate what is best and noblest in the religious philosophy and civilization of these ancient nations; to recognize them all alike to be historical forms of the upward movement of the human spirit away from sense and passion and worldliness to faith in righteousness, love and God,—this is the primary conviction which alone can assure peace among the warring religions and peoples of the earth. It is our high privilege as free and tolerant believers to be the prophets and representatives of this irenic method in the mission field.

Our excellent mission in Tokyo and the scientific, sympathetic spirit in which it has been conducted by Rev. Clay MacCauley and his faithful co-workers for twenty-five years past has gained in unprecedented degree the confidence and good-will of the educated classes of Japan, and has become a useful auxiliary in promoting a better understanding between that country and our own people.

A similar work is now to be modestly inaugurated in China. These endeavors, humble as they are, will at least serve as object-lessons to the Christian world, and aid in that transformation of missionary attitude and methods which is now going on, and which is necessary to enable Christian missions to do their best work and exert their most benign influence.

It was hoped that the world pilgrimage of Unitarian and other liberal Christian thinkers, which had been arranged for this very year, might prove useful in increasing this sympathy of religions and world brotherhood. The outbreak of the war and other causes have prevented this journey around the world together. May the journey prove not to have been abandoned, but only postponed!

Finally, a new and promising opportunity to promote the international peace of the world will come to us at the close of the present European war through the medium of the International Congress of Unitarian and Other Religious Liberals, now known as the International Congress of Free Christians and Other Religious Liberals. In this great association, for fifteen years past, the representatives of over thirty nations and one hundred different religious fellowships have taken part. The present war destroys for the time the possibility of any higher activity, especially through concerted endeavors. Ethical and religious teachers in all nations who but yesterday were working together amicably and earnestly for the promotion of common ideals of freedom, mutual sympathy, and progress in religion are to-day sundered, distrustful, and often in violent antagonism towards one another.

The endeavors of our world Congress for the present and immediate future are paralyzed, and many even doubt the possibility of its continued existence. But already the signs are multiplying that, in reality, the conclusion of the war will call for the rehabilitation of our Congress and enable it to enter upon a new and higher stage of usefulness.

Amid all the misunderstanding, passion and violence that attend this terrible struggle between the nations, the conviction is dawning in the souls of high-minded men and women throughout our distracted Christendom that whatever be the folly or misfortunes of any single generation there are certain spiritual values which can never be destroyed. The pursuit of truth, the practice of virtue, the enjoyment of the beautiful, the love of our fellows,

the worship of God,—these ideal interests in which the glory and hope of our race so largely consist, are not subject to the idle wrath of man or the vicissitudes of a military campaign. They are eternal verities, as firmly placed in the spirit's skies as are the lights of heaven! Recent correspondence with eminent scholars in Great Britain, Germany, France, and a dozen other warring countries, reveals that there is awakening a more inclusive and pacific spirit among them. The conviction is reasserting itself that intellectual and spiritual issues must again assume their rightful place as the paramount interests of human life. Learning, philosophy, science, art, ethics, religion,—these are not ephemeral in their nature, or limited by boundaries of nationality or race, much less are they subject to the arbitrament of sword or cannon. They will remain forever the common aims of the higher kind of men and women in all nations. Therefore, when the war-drums beat no longer, the beating of the heart of humanity will again be listened to; when the gory war-flags of the nations are furled, the white flag of universal peace will receive the homage of a thankful Christendom, and free-minded, large-hearted, religious teachers in all countries, responding to the invitation of our International Congress, will assemble once more to renew their severed friendships, and by united efforts advance the triumph of reason, freedom, and progress in religion, the brotherhood of man, and the peaceful federation of the world.

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